

THE SOUTH AFRICA WE WANT TO LIVE IN

South Africa could be a happier, better place if only we would listen to one another, writes **Ryland Fisher**

South Africans are accused of depending too much on government, however, **a group of nongovernmental organisations tried to find out what South Africans can do independently of and alongside government to help bring about the country we all deserve to live in.**

The project – which started as a series of dialogues hosted by the Community Chest of the Western Cape, the District Six Museum and the One City, Many Cultures Project – resulted in a book called *The South Africa We Want To Live In*, which contains **the voices of South Africans from across the country, of all races and genders, young and old, rich and poor, and from different sectors of society.**

I was privileged to facilitate this project, which opened my eyes to the potential that exists in South Africa if we would only be prepared to listen to each other.

The dialogues, which were driven from the floor and not by panellists sitting on a platform, allowed audience members to share their hopes and dreams about the society in which they wish to live.

The voices and the issues were disparate, indicating the many problems we face, but often solutions were also offered.

AND THE PEOPLE SPOKE

Reverend Charles Williams of the Anglican Church raised the difficult issue of land redistribution at the dialogue in Paarl. **“We need to look at a new dispensation for land redistribution. The system we had is not working. Is there a new system that we can collectively agree upon so that there could be cohesiveness, integration, the sharing of wealth and the land for a better society?”** he asked.

At the dialogue held at the picturesque George campus of Nelson Mandela University, the issues discussed included education, what to do with young people when they are not at school, South Africa’s legal system, the need for ethical leadership and, of course, the land. “All institutions in society should work together. How do we get churches, the educational sector and the business sector working together to develop a mindset that says, ‘how do we serve as opposed to being served?’” asked community activist Veliswa Mbenenge.

Racism featured quite strongly at the dialogue held at Stellenbosch University, along with issues such as xenophobia, gender violence, corruption, crime and after-school care for children. “I have two things when I think about the South Africa I would love to live in. One is that race should no longer frame our interpersonal relationships and our judgments of people. The second thing is that I want to live in a country where gender-based violence is the exception, not the norm,” said Dr Ubanisia Adams-Jack.

“How do we get churches, the educational sector and the business sector working together to develop a mindset that says, ‘how do we serve as opposed to being served?’” – Veliswa Mbenenge



At the dialogue in Athlone, Alex Pongola expressed the frustration that many have with government. **“I am so dismayed that our democratic government is unable even to realise the first clause of the Freedom Charter: The people shall govern.** We are observing a society that is so demoralised,” he said.

“What went wrong? Even during apartheid, our communities, through the policy of black consciousness, were able to fend for themselves. But now we are being made to look to someone else to provide for us.”

Anthea Bredenkamp, speaking at the final dialogue held at the District Six Homecoming Centre, shared his frustrations. **“We’re sitting with political parties whose main agenda is to fight each other.** For instance, anything that comes out of the DA’s mouth is about what’s been done wrong by the ANC. The same with the EFF. No solutions are being given. It is just about one trying to prove their moral higher ground to the other one. **That dissension is trickling down all the way from the top to the man on the street.”**

Government and others with influence would do well to listen to some of the voices that spoke or contributed in writing to this important project. ■